

***House Committee approves legislation providing partial funding stream;
Congressmen remain focused on fully funding "county payments" law***

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WASHINGTON, DC—The House Resources Committee today approved a bipartisan amendment offered by Oregon Congressmen Greg Walden, R-Hood River, and Peter DeFazio, D-Springfield, that would provide an annual revenue stream to partially fund the critical Secure Rural Schools and Community Self-Determination Reauthorization Act of 2005 (H.R. 517), which would reauthorize the "county payments" program. Walden and DeFazio are cosponsors of H.R. 517 and are leading the effort in the House to see it is enacted.

The Walden-DeFazio amendment, approved unanimously by the committee, was made to the bipartisan Deep Ocean Energy Resources Act, which would give coastal states the option to allow energy exploration on America's outer continental shelf (OCS). The amendment mandates that \$50 million of new royalties collected by the federal government from companies engaged in OCS exploration be automatically directed to the county payments program each year for five years, for a total of \$250 million.

Although \$250 million is only a portion of the total amount needed for the federal government to meet its commitment to timber communities throughout America, Walden and DeFazio believe this is an important first step and they remain strongly committed to their bipartisan effort in the House and Senate to find revenue streams to reach the \$450 million annually to fully fund the program.

Following today's committee vote, Walden and DeFazio issued the following joint statement:

"We fully recognize that this amendment to provide \$250 million to pay for the county roads and schools program is only the first step forward in what is an incremental approach toward fully funding this program. This funding source gets us one-ninth of the way. In effect, we've gotten through the first inning of the game, but we have eight more to go before we can declare a true victory.

"As we have said all along, getting this program reauthorized will require creative work. We will continue to look at each and every available option to provide a revenue stream that will

allow the federal government to maintain its century-old commitment to the counties and schools in forested areas that depend on this assistance. With this first step, the Senate and House can now build upon this foundation.

“More than 100 years ago, Congress recognized that these counties and communities with federally owned forestland within their boundaries would not be able to provide basic services because of the reduction in local property tax base. Congress also recognized that national forests exist for the benefit of an entire nation, and therefore, the entire nation has a role in maintaining the health of our forests and their surrounding communities.

“The county payments program has been praised by organizations from the farthest ends of the spectrum as a model partnership among local, state and federal interests. There is no question that this program funds vital county services in hundreds of counties across America.

“We appreciate the support shown today by our colleagues on the House Resources Committee in taking a first step toward funding the county payments program and look forward to earning the approval of the full House and additional support in the Senate. However, we recognize that much work remains and we will stay focused on our ultimate goal.”

H.R. 517 was passed by the House Resources Committee last year and is currently awaiting action in the House Agriculture Committee. S 267 is its companion legislation in the Senate, sponsored by Senators Larry Craig, R-Id, and Ron Wyden, D-Ore. More information on H.R. 517, which has 104 additional cosponsors, and S 267, which has 24 additional cosponsors, is available on the web at <http://thomas.loc.gov>.

Congressman Walden represents the 2nd District of Oregon; Congressman DeFazio represents the 4th District of Oregon.